

# LEARN ABOUT THE UNITED NATIONS

Globalfest 2001

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*The UN Logo shows the world held in the "olive branches of peace."*

## INTRODUCTION

Why is it important to study the United Nations (UN)? The Purpose of the UN is to bring all nations of the world together to work for peace and development, based on the principles of justice, human dignity and the well-being of all people. It affords the opportunity for countries to balance global interdependence and national interests when addressing international problems.

Contrary to one popularly-held belief, the UN is not intended to be a "world government." One of the chief principles of the UN is that of "national sovereignty" - this means that the borders, laws and traditions of each country cannot be intruded on by any other government, by any international agency, or by the UN itself. The exceptions to this rule occur when the Security Council agrees that there exists a significant threat to peace and security.

People across the world today are becoming increasingly interdependent on one another. While governments maintain their own national borders, many influences do not recognize borders. Examples of these forces include international investments by privately-held companies, threats to health such as HIV/AIDS and poliomyelitis, and environmental threats such as pollution and global

warming. The UN exists to address these issues, as well as to assist peoples in need around the world to overcome poverty, starvation, disease and oppression and to provide opportunities for education, employment and development.

By becoming students of the UN we come to understand the challenges and limitations faced by this complex and often-misunderstood organization. This workshop cannot cover all of the UN's works, history and procedures, but we will discuss many of the resources that exist to assist our studies of the UN.

*"Applaud us when we prevail; correct us when we fail; but, above all, do not let this indispensable, irreplaceable institution wither, languish or perish as a result of Member States' indifference, inattention or financial starvation."*

Kofi Annan, UN Secretary-General

## I. HISTORY OF THE UNITED NATIONS

### A. THE CHARTER

First named by United States President Franklin Delano Roosevelt during World War II, the UN began as a declaration among Allied governments to oppose the Axis powers. After the war, the “UN” as we know it was officially chartered at the United Nations Conference on International Organization in San Francisco on 26 June 1945 by the original 51 Member States.

Final ratification of the Charter by the five permanent member states and a majority of signatory states occurred on 24 October 1945 (now commemorated annually as United Nations Day). The fifty-fifth session of the General Assembly in September, 2000 admitted Tuvalu, the 189th Member State.

The UN Charter establishes the conditions for membership, sets the purpose and structure of the Organization, and lays out the fundamental rights and principles which are to apply to all Member States. The Charter is an international treaty, and all Members are expected to observe the provisions of the Charter as a matter of international law.

While often misunderstood as an attempt at “world government,” the UN is committed to the inviolability of the sovereignty of each Member State and acts as a forum for the resolution of issues of international concern. As described by the Charter, the founding principles of the UN include affirming fundamental human rights and promoting self-determination of peoples, respecting international law and international treaties, maintaining international peace and security, and

promoting economic and social development for all peoples.

Certain expectations are held for all UN Member States. Members are expected to fulfil in good faith their obligations as outlined in the Charter (such as payment of assessed dues), settle their international disputes by peaceful means, refrain from the threat or use of force against another State, and assist the UN in accordance with the Charter. The Charter does not grant the UN any authority to intervene in domestic matters of any State.

### B. WHAT HAS THE UN DONE?

- The UN and its agencies have improved the health of millions - immunizing the world’s children, fighting malaria and parasitic disease, providing safe drinking water, protecting consumers’ health, and eradicating smallpox (polio eradication projected to occur soon). As a result, longevity and life expectancy have increased all over the world.
- More international law has been developed through the UN in the past five decades than in the entire previous history of humankind.
- UN relief agencies help to aid and protect more than 25 million refugees and displaced persons throughout the world.
- The UN formulated in 1948 the Universal Declaration of Human Rights - an historic proclamation of the rights and freedoms to which all men and women are entitled. Over 80 UN human rights treaties protect and promote specific rights.

#### The goals and principles of the UN are illustrated by the Preamble to the Charter:

*“We the peoples of the United Nations determined to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind, and to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small, and to establish conditions under which justice and respect for the obligations arising from treaties and other sources of international law can be maintained, and to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom, and for these ends, to practice tolerance and live together in peace with one another as good neighbours, and to unite our strength to maintain international peace and security, and to ensure, by the acceptance of principles and the institution of methods, that armed force shall not be used, save in the common interest, and to employ international machinery for the promotion of the economic and social advancement of all peoples, have resolved to combine our efforts to accomplish these aims.*

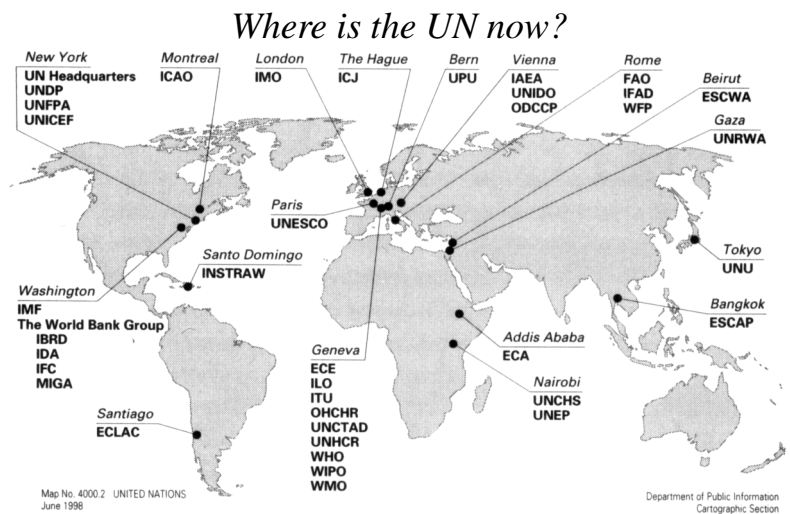
*Accordingly, our respective Governments, through representatives assembled in the city of San Francisco, who have exhibited their full powers found to be in good and due form, have agreed to the present Charter of the United Nations and do hereby establish an international organization to be known as the United Nations.”*

26 June 1945

- The UN and its agencies, including the World Bank and the UN Development Programme (UNDP), are

the premier vehicles for furthering development in poorer countries, providing assistance worth over \$25 billion a year.

- The UN has helped strengthen the democratic process by assisting elections in over 70 countries.
- UNDP is the world's largest international provider of grants for development.
- UN appeals raise over \$1 billion per year for emergency assistance to people affected by war and natural disaster.
- The World Food Programme - the world's largest food-aid organization - provides about one third of the world's food each year.
- The UN was a promoter of the great movement of decolonization, which led to the independence of more than 80 nations.



- The UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Health Organization (WHO) have carried out a global immunization campaign against six killer diseases, saving the lives of more than 2 million children every year.

## II. STRUCTURE AND FUNCTION OF THE UN

### A. MAIN UN ORGANS

The UN Charter establishes the primary organs of the UN as the General Assembly, Security Council, Economic and Social Council, Trusteeship Council, International Court of Justice, and Secretariat.

**General Assembly (GA)** - One of the primary organs of the UN, the GA is considered the main deliberative body. Every Member State has a single vote on the GA and within each of its main committees. The Charter of the UN gives the General Assembly considerable responsibilities, although most actions of the GA are in the form of recommendations to Member States or to other UN bodies and international organizations. Issues of preliminary consideration are usually relegated to the six main committees of the GA: First Committee - Disarmament and International Security, Second Committee - Economic and Financial, Third Committee - Social, Humanitarian and Cultural, Fourth Committee - Special Political and Decolonization, Fifth Committee - Administrative and Budget, and Sixth Committee - Legal. Each committee presents its work in the form of written resolutions to the GA Plenary, which then further deliberates and votes upon the committee recommendations.

**Security Council (SC)** - The main responsibility of the SC is the maintenance of international peace and security.

Members of the SC include the five "permanent members" - China, France, Russian Federation (formerly USSR), United Kingdom and United States - as well as ten rotating members, elected by the GA for two-year terms. The permanent members all have the ability to veto any action of the SC, making their agreement critical in any SC endeavor. The SC is the only UN organ which has the authority to demand actions on the part of Member States; all other UN resolutions are recommendatory.

**Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)** - As a primary UN organ, the mandate of ECOSOC is to coordinate economic and social efforts between the UN and the various specialized agencies and institutions. ECOSOC has 54 members, elected for three year terms; each member has a single vote. The most recent efforts of ECOSOC have been to strengthen cooperation between main UN bodies and other agencies and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), in furtherance of international conferences, treaties and resolutions. Resolutions of ECOSOC are in the form of policy recommendations on social, cultural, educational, health and related matters.

**Trusteeship Council** - Intended to oversee the administration of the original eleven Trust Territories, known as the Trusteeship System, the Council seems somewhat obsolete since all Trust Territories have now gained independence or self-governance. The Council has

amended its mandate so that it may meet whenever and wherever the situation warrants. The membership of the Council consists of the five permanent members of the SC.

**International Court of Justice (ICJ)** - ICJ acts as the principal international judicial body. All UN Member States are automatic parties to the ICJ Statute. The Court may preside over cases brought to it by parties to the Statute, and it may be asked to give advisory opinions relating to international law to other UN organs or specialized agencies as appropriate. Rulings are based upon international conventions and treaties, international custom, general principles of law, and judicial decisions and teachings of those individuals most qualified among various nations. The Court's jurisdiction includes any matter brought before it by parties. Fifteen judges sit on the court, elected by the General Assembly to serve renewable nine-year terms.

**Secretariat** - As defined by the UN Charter, the Secretariat is the international staff which conducts the day-to-day operations and administration of the Organization. The Secretary-General (SG) is defined as the chief administrative officer of the UN, although the job also involves acting as the main spokesperson, diplomat and activist of the UN. As such, the SG's actions and statements carry enormous influence in the international community, and the SG often intervenes in international situations to promote peaceful resolutions. With UN reform being a major priority for Member States, a new position was recently created for the Deputy Secretary-General, who would oversee implementation of UN reform efforts as well as consolidate inter-organizational efforts.

## **B. SELECTED UN AGENCIES**

While the primary organs perform much important policy work in the international forum, direct action on particular issues is typically undertaken by UN specialized agencies. As an example of the interdependence and cooperation of UN specialized agencies, six selected agencies are described below.

All of these agencies have chosen to pool their resources to form the **Joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS)**. The increasingly prevalent threat of Human

Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) infection and the corresponding disease Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) prompted six UN agencies to work cooperatively to combat HIV/AIDS. UNAIDS' main objectives are to prevent transmission of the disease, to assist in providing support and care for HIV/AIDS sufferers, to reduce the susceptibility of communities and individuals to the disease, and to alleviate the impact of the disease.

**United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)** - The only UN agency dedicated exclusively to helping children, UNICEF was founded in the wake of war in 1946. Since its inception, UNICEF has labored to improve the welfare of children everywhere, with specific attention to children in developing countries. UNICEF supports the full implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). A large network of personnel works with various other UN and non-UN agencies and governments to support improved living conditions, development, education and health for children worldwide. UNICEF reports to ECOSOC.

**United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)** - Since 1965, UNDP has served as a coordinating body for financial assistance and field efforts in sustainable development. UNDP strives to raise the profile of the UN as a force for worldwide sustainable development, and uses its coordinating powers to aid the environment, alleviate impoverishment and unemployment, and improve the status of women. UNDP reports to the GA.

**United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)** - Through the promotion of peaceful uses of scientific resources and research, improved education, cultural identity and free communication, UNESCO strives for lasting world peace founded upon the solidarity of humankind. UNESCO reports to ECOSOC.

**United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)** - In response to an ever-escalating world population, UNFPA was formed in 1969. UNFPA works to control population by promoting advancement of women, reproductive health and family planning. Contrary to popular opinion, UNFPA does not endorse abortion; in fact it actively promotes local family planning efforts which do not include termination of pregnancies. UNFPA reports to the GA.

### *The United Nations Secretaries-General*

*Trygve Lie (Norway) 1946-1952*  
*Dag Hammarskjöld (Sweden) 1953-1961*  
*U Thant (Burma, now Myanmar) 1961-1971*  
*Kurt Waldheim (Austria) 1972-1981*  
*Javier Pérez de Cuellar (Peru) 1982-1991*  
*Boutros Boutros-Ghali (Egypt) 1992-1996*  
*Kofi Annan (Ghana) 1997-present*

**World Bank** - The “Bank” is actually a collection of four international financing agencies. The institutions of the World Bank Group aim collectively to improve standards of living by promoting economic growth and development, originally in post-World War II Europe but now usually in poorer countries. The World Bank reports to ECOSOC.

**World Health Organization (WHO)** - Founded in 1948, WHO has three guiding principles: (a) to give worldwide guidance in the field of health, (b) to work with Member States in improving national health programs, and (c) to develop and to transfer information and technology in



*“Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”  
The Golden Rule, Norman Rockwell. Donated to the UN by the United States, this mosaic is located outside the ECOSOC chambers at the UN Headquarters in New York.*

order to attain the highest standards of health for all. Health is also enumerated as a basic human right under Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Activities of WHO in the past have included combating new and recurring infectious diseases, such as eradicating smallpox in 1980 and treating the Ebola outbreak in Central Africa in 1995, providing information internationally regarding effective treatments, drugs and technologies for disease, advising on the health ramifications of various types of technology and weaponry, and providing assistance in emergency situations with appropriate supplies and personnel. WHO reports to ECOSOC.

### III. LEARNING ABOUT UN PROCEDURE: MODEL UN

#### A. VALUE OF MUN IN EDUCATION - AND FUN!

**M**odel United Nations (MUN) is simulation of a UN organ or agency, in which students role play as different UN Member States to debate current issues on the Organization's vast agenda. The students, serving as “Distinguished Representatives” of their State, prepare draft resolutions, negotiate with supporters and adversaries, resolve conflicts, and navigate the UN's rules of procedure in the interest of mobilizing international cooperation to resolve multinational problems.

Before playing out their ambassadorial roles in MUN, students research the global problems to be addressed. The problems are drawn from today's headlines. MUNers learn how the international community acts on its concerns about peace and security, human rights, the environment, food and hunger, economic development, globalization, and more.

MUN representatives also look closely at the needs, aspirations, and foreign policy of the country they will represent at the event. The insights they gain from their exploration of history, geography, mathematics, culture, economics and science contribute to the authenticity of

the simulation once the actual role playing gets underway, and ensures a lively and memorable experience.

For over 50 years now, teachers and students have benefited from and enjoyed this interactive learning experience that not only involves young people in the study and discussion of global issues but also encourages the development of skills useful throughout their lives such as research, writing, public speaking, problem solving, consensus building, conflict resolution, compromise and cooperation.

The popularity of MUNing has contributed to the rapid growth of this activity over several decades, and today upwards of 200,000 high school and college/university students participate in a MUN simulation each year. Some are classroom exercises, others school-wide, and still others regional, national, or international.

Quite a few of today's leaders in law, government, business, and the arts participated in MUN during their academic career, from US Supreme Court Justice Stephen Breyer and World Court Justice Stephen M. Schwebel to actor Samuel L. Jackson. And yes, Chelsea Clinton is a MUN veteran as well.

## ***B. LOCAL, REGIONAL AND NATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES***

**L**ocally, the MUN club at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign hosts an annual MUN simulation entitled "Model United Nations at Illinois" (MUNI). This year's MUNI will be held from 27-28 April on the UIUC campus. If your high school is interested, please contact Jason Wilson, Secretary-General ([jwilson2@uiuc.edu](mailto:jwilson2@uiuc.edu)) to see if country assignments are still available.

**Regionally**, a number of MUN conferences are held at the high school level. Below is a list of high school MUN conferences in the state of Illinois.

***Model United Nations at Illinois (MUNI)*** - see above. MUNI, entering its sixth year, hosts students from Illinois and surrounding states and simulates four UN bodies. This is a professional, inexpensive opportunity for beginners to learn how to participate in MUN.

***Model United Nations of the University of Chicago (MUNUC)*** - Held each year in February, MUNUC is rapidly becoming one of the largest

high school MUN conferences in the United States. This past year, MUNUC featured sixteen UN simulations. Contact Jennifer Schulp ([jjschulp@munuc.org](mailto:jjschulp@munuc.org)) for more information.

***Illinois Model LAS*** - Held in East Peoria during the month of March. Contact Eric Christian ([echristian@ill.cl.il.us](mailto:echristian@ill.cl.il.us)) for more information.

See Section V for references to more MUN simulations **nationally and worldwide**.

Each year the United Nations Association of the United States of America (UNA-USA - see Section IV) holds the **Model UN Summit and Leadership Conference**. The Summit is typically held during the summer in New York City, and includes UN speakers and a visit to the UN, along with workshops on MUN preparation, participation and leadership. This year's Summit will be held from 10-15 July 2001 at Fordham University in New York City. Participation is open to all high school and collegiate students and instructors, as well as other interested parties. See Section V for web link to this event.

## ***IV. UNITED NATIONS ASSOCIATION: HOW CAN WE SUPPORT THE UN?***

### ***A. UNA-USA AND ITS SUPPORT OF THE UN***

**T**he United Nations Association of the United States of America (UNA-USA) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan national organization dedicated to enhancing US participation in the United Nations system and to strengthening that system as it seeks to define and carry out its mission. UNA-USA's action agenda uniquely combines education and public research, substantive policy analysis, and ongoing US-UN dialogue.

UNA-USA is a leading center of policy research on the United Nations and global issues such as environment, security, narcotics, development, and human rights. With 23,000 members nationwide, UNA combines broad grassroots outreach with high-level policy studies involving scholars and government officials from many parts of the world in order to identify fresh ideas and areas of potential cooperation.

Through a series of programs, UNA-USA brings together leaders of

business, Congress, academia, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and the UN community for discussions of pressing problems on the international agenda. UNA-USA continues to pioneer efforts to involve the American public in the discussion of foreign policy priorities as well as to provide information and educational materials for Congress, the Executive Branch, the

*Model United Nations programs allow us to develop skills in public speaking, debate, research, writing, negotiation and compromise. We also gain valuable perspective on other nationalities and cultures.*



corporate community, NGOs, the media, and the public at large. Through its national network of over 170 community-based Chapters and Divisions, and through its 145-member Council of Organizations, UNA-USA reaches out to millions of concerned citizens who want their voices heard in Washington and at the United Nations.

Headquartered in New York City just a few blocks from United Nations headquarters, the Association operates with a staff of over 30 full-time employees and an annual budget of approximately \$4.3 million. Funding is provided by private foundations, corporations, individuals, and membership dues rather than by the US Government or the United Nations.

## B. OPPORTUNITIES PROVIDED BY UNA-USA

By demonstrating their commitment to strengthening the US-UN relationship, members of UNA-USA have access to the following resources:

- A *New Member's Kit* including a personalized membership card and a primer on the United Nations.
- A subscription to UNA-USA's acclaimed journal, The *InterDependent*, with behind-the-scenes

news and views on the world body.

- Special reports from *foreign policy experts* and UNA-USA leaders.
- *Discounts* on UNA-USA and UN publications.
- Invitations to attend *briefings and seminars* offered by UNA-USA's Chapters and Divisions in 175 communities nationwide.
- The chance to join with others in their community to contribute to a stronger UN by participating in the *Global Policy Project*, UNA-USA's annual study/action project.
- Opportunities to work cooperatively with the *local chapters* of members of UNA's Council of Organizations.
- Information on participating in major events on the *UN calendar*.
- *Contacts* with members of other UN Associations in 80 nations worldwide.
- The opportunity to participate in Chapter-sponsored *service projects*, bringing information and opportunities for involvement to students and other citizens.

See the UNA-USA membership brochure included with this packet and references in Section V for additional information.

## V. REFERENCES AND RESOURCES FOR UN INFORMATION

References used in the preparation of this handout are noted below, followed by WWW links and other publications which are recommended resources for interested students of the United Nations.

The United Nations Foundation provides a free service entitled **UN Wire**, in which extensively archived, linked and cross-referenced news items are listed daily regarding UN issues worldwide. Everyone is strongly encouraged to visit and subscribe to UN Wire at [www.unfoundation.org/unwire](http://www.unfoundation.org/unwire) - the information is well-summarized, with links to more detailed media sources. This site is a must for the UN scholar!

Additionally, national news organizations such as the *New York Times* ([www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com)) provide detailed information on international issues more thoroughly than many local newspapers.

Some references/resources apply to multiple topics. The quotations and images contained in this handout also came from the listed references.

### I. HISTORY OF THE UNITED NATIONS

#### A. The Charter References

- American Model United Nations *Simulation Guide*, 3rd Edition, 2000
- *Basic Facts About the United Nations*, United Nations Department of Public Information, 1998
- Charter of the United Nations and Statute of the International Court of Justice
- United Nations Homepage, [www.un.org](http://www.un.org)

#### B. What has the UN done?

##### References

- *Image & Reality: Questions and answers about the United Nations*, United Nations Department of Public Information, 1999
- *This is the United Nations*, UN Office of Communications and Public Information, 1999

##### Resources

- *Basic Facts About the United Nations*, United Nations Department of Public Information, 1998
- *Globalization: The United Nations Development Dialogue: Finance, Trade, Poverty, Peace-building*, Isabelle Grunberg and Sarbuland Khan, United Nations University Press, 2000
- United Nations Homepage, [www.un.org](http://www.un.org)

- “We the Peoples:” *The Role of the United Nations in the 21st Century*, Kofi A. Annan, United Nations Department of Public Information, 2000

## II. STRUCTURE AND FUNCTION OF THE UN

### A. Main UN organs

#### References

- American Model United Nations *Simulation Guide*, 3rd Edition, 2000
- *Basic Facts About the United Nations*, United Nations Department of Public Information, 1998
- Charter of the United Nations and Statute of the International Court of Justice
- United Nations Homepage, [www.un.org](http://www.un.org)

### B. Selected UN agencies

#### References

- American Model United Nations *Simulation Guide*, 3rd Edition, 2000
- *Basic Facts About the United Nations*, United Nations Department of Public Information, 1998
- United Nations Homepage, [www.un.org](http://www.un.org)

#### Resources

- WWW Sites for Selected UN agencies (see Section IIB for descriptions of agencies):  
UNAIDS: [www.unaids.org](http://www.unaids.org)  
UNDP: [www.undp.org](http://www.undp.org)  
UNICEF: [www.unicef.org](http://www.unicef.org)  
UNFPA: [www.unfpa.org](http://www.unfpa.org)  
UNESCO: [www.unesco.org](http://www.unesco.org)  
WHO: [www.who.ch](http://www.who.ch)  
World Bank: [www.worldbank.org](http://www.worldbank.org)
- *Human Development Report 2000*, United Nations Development Programme, 2000
- *The State of the World's Children 2000*, United Nations Children's Fund, 2000
- *The World Health Report 2000 - Health Systems: Improving Performance*, World Health Organization, 2000

## III. LEARNING ABOUT UN PROCEDURE: MODEL UN

### A. Value of MUN in education - and fun!

#### References

- American Model United Nations Homepage, [www.amun.org](http://www.amun.org)
- UNA-USA Model UN and Education Programs Directory, [www.unausa.org/programs/mun.htm](http://www.unausa.org/programs/mun.htm)

### B. Local, regional and national opportunities

#### References

- Calendar of Model UN Conferences, 2000-2001, United Nations Association, [www.unausa.org/programs/mun/2000calendar.pdf](http://www.unausa.org/programs/mun/2000calendar.pdf) (available free for download - lists nearly 350 MUN simulations for high school and collegiate students!)
- Model United Nations at Illinois, [www.uiuc.edu/ro/mun/muni\\_2001.htm](http://www.uiuc.edu/ro/mun/muni_2001.htm)
- For more information regarding the annual Model UN Summit and Leadership Conference, see the UNA-USA website: [www.unausa.org/programs/mun/summit.htm](http://www.unausa.org/programs/mun/summit.htm)

## IV. UNITED NATIONS ASSOCIATION: HOW CAN WE SUPPORT THE UN?

### A. UNA and its support of the UN

#### Reference

- About UNA-USA, [www.unausa.org/about\\_unausa/](http://www.unausa.org/about_unausa/) (see also the other pages under the UNA-USA Homepage for additional opportunities, events and policy discussion)

### B. Opportunities provided by UNA

#### Reference

- UNA-USA Membership, [www.unausa.org/membership/](http://www.unausa.org/membership/) (see also the other pages under the UNA-USA Homepage for additional opportunities, events and policy discussion)

*In addition to these resources,  
please feel free to contact me personally ([wolfe@uiuc.edu](mailto:wolfe@uiuc.edu))  
if you have questions about any of these topics -- if I cannot answer  
your questions, I can probably find someone who can!*